

Statement of  
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MSD Ft. Myers, Fl.

Two (2) pages total including this cover

03 JAN 2003

On 30 December 2003, at approximately 1715, I received notification from LCDR Holland that an inspected vessel sank in Everglades National Park, Everglades City, with 34 people on board. I informed LCDR Holland that this was MSO Miami's AOR. He replied that he was aware of that and that D7 had requested help from MSD FT Myers. I called CWO Mike Hammond and informed him of the situation and that we would be responding. We met at MSD FT Myers and departed enroute to Everglades City at approximately 1815. We arrived in Everglades National Park at approximately 1930 and first met with Park Ranger Kiefer Gier. Ranger Gier briefed us on the current situation and stated that 34 passengers had been recovered safely from the sunken vessel Panther with no injuries. All passengers had departed the scene at this time. Ranger Gier stated that there were conflicting statements being made by the vessel's owner, Sammy Hamilton. Mr. Hamilton stated to Ranger Gier that there had only been 29 passengers on board. Ranger Gier stated that he had collected the names and contact information for 34 passengers. Ranger Gier stated that immediately after the vessel had sunk he requested a passenger manifest from the owner. The owner verbally told him the passenger count was 29, but could not produce the passenger manifest at that time. Ranger Gier also stated that the Captain was told by the vessel owner to tell the Coast Guard that a 10-year-old boy was the acting deckhand at the time of the sinking. Ranger Gier stated that he had release the Captain of the vessel 15 minutes prior to our arrival to a local hotel to rest. Ranger Gier stated that the park service was securing the scene around the sunken vessel and the vessel's owner had a salvage team standing by to recover the vessel. I told Ranger Gier that MSO Miami would be handling the investigation and once they arrived on scene they would direct when the vessel could be recovered. At the completion of our briefing, we met with the vessel's owner, Sammy Hamilton and were told by him that the vessel had 29 passengers on board when it sank. He speculated that the vessel sank after swamping from the wake thrown by a passing crab boat.

By approximately 2030, MSO Miami investigators had not shown up, so I told Ranger Gier to contact the Captain and have him return to the ranger office to provide a written statement. When the Captain arrived we introduced ourselves and informed him that the Coast Guard would be conducting an investigation into the sinking of the vessel. The Captain was very cooperative and stated that his statement would be as detailed as possible since he wanted others to learn from this accident. We briefly discussed with Captain the sinking and he stated that immediately prior to the vessel sinking he noticed that all three indicator lights for the vessel's bilge pumps were energized. He asked the passengers located near the overboard discharges to inform him if water was being pumped out. Soon after the passengers replied that water was being pumped the vessel swamped. The Captain stated that the vessel sank so quickly that only 3 people were able to don their lifejackets. The Captain stated that very quickly several good Samaritans responded and helped to recover the passengers from the water. We finished our discussion and Ranger Gier provided the Captain with a computer to complete his statement on.

At approximately 2115 investigators from MSO Miami arrived. We briefed them on the information we had received up to that pointed and noted that there were many conflicting details in the accounts provided by Ranger Gier, Sammy Hamilton and the vessel's Captain. We also showed them a sister vessel to the Panther, the Panther II which was moored at the Ranger office. We noted how close the scuppers of the Panther II were to the waterline. We departed the Ranger office at approximately 2130 and arrived back at MSD FT Myers at 2245.

*LT Ryan D. Allens*

OPTIONAL FORM 99 (7-90)

## FAX TRANSMITTAL

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